

**PRESS ALERT**

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**Media Contacts:**

Katharine Shapiro, Vermonters for Justice in Palestine | 802-249-3782 | shapiro.kathy@gmail.com  
Wafic Faour, Vermonters for Justice in Palestine | 802-310-0212 | waficfaour@gmail.com

**Colonel Matthew Birmingham Cancels Vermont State Police Training with Israeli Military**

**Montpelier, VT (November 29, 2018):** For the first time in 20 years, the all expense-paid trips to Israel that bring together American law enforcement with Israeli military and riot police have run into a snag – from Montpelier to New Haven, Northampton to Providence, local residents have been contacting their elected officials and police departments, demanding they end their participation in the programs. In Vermont, activists requested a meeting with the State Police Director, collected 11 organizational endorsements on a petition, and organized dozens of residents across the state to send personal emails asking the director to “Skip the Trip”. In Northampton, a meeting with the Mayor was followed by a targeted letter writing campaign.

Earlier this week, Vermont State Police Director Colonel Birmingham told local organizers from across Vermont that he had cancelled the Vermont State Police’s participation in the Anti-Defamation League’s upcoming Leadership, Resilience and Counter-Terrorism Seminar in Israel, scheduled Dec. 2-11. The next day, after a meeting with concerned Pioneer Valley residents, Northampton Mayor Narkewicz withdrew Police Commissioner Kasper from the same trip.

With the growing concern about US law enforcement's treatment of asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border, New England residents are asking if they want their local police receiving training from the Israeli military. According to the VT National Lawyers Guild chair Henry Harris, “To support shared training and tactics with the Israeli occupation is to lose all credibility and morality in public view of the people of Vermont.” Bernadine Mellis, a professor at Mount Holyoke College and a member of the Northampton coalition points out “Our police chiefs’ salaries are tax-payer funded. While they’re abroad on these trainings, we’re still paying their salaries, We don’t know anything about the actual content of these trainings...That lack of transparency is extremely concerning.”

The Leadership, Resilience and Counter-Terrorism Seminar, (previously called the Counter-Terrorism Seminar) has run annually since 2002. Organized and funded by the Anti-Defamation League, the trips’ participants include police chiefs and sheriffs from across the country as well as FBI agents, US Air Marshals, and ICE agents, including the former Deputy Director of ICE in 2015. This is the first time that any invitees have withdrawn, the result of the growing national campaign [Deadly Exchange](#), a project of Jewish Voice for Peace, and [intensive research involving over one hundred records requests](#).

Stefanie Fox, deputy director at Jewish Voice for Peace and an active member of *Deadly Exchange* pointed out that, "These cancellations prove that when people learn that their local police are going to get training by the Israeli military, they get upset and they organize. It's pretty clear that people don't want their local police being militarized – and they don't think that the Israeli military and law enforcement are a good model to follow."

The petition calling on the Colonel to cancel participation in the seminar was sent to him on November 27th and was signed by Vermonters for Justice in Palestine, Students for Justice in Palestine at UVM, Justice for All, Migrant Justice, Peace & Justice Center, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Burlington, Black Lives Matter Greater Burlington, Jubilee Justice Committee, Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Burlington VT, Green Mountain Solidarity with Palestine, New England Yearly Meeting of Friends, Israel-Palestine Working Group National Lawyers Guild Vermont, Brattleboro Common Sense, and Jewish Voice for Peace.

*Interviews are available with local residents active in the Vermont campaign as well as the Northampton campaign, and with staff and members of Jewish Voice for Peace.*

### **Vermont quotes**

"We are very encouraged by the Vermont State Police's decision not to participate in this counter-productive training. Whether it's the Israeli military or Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Vermont law enforcement should not be taking its cues from agencies with clear track records of human rights abuses," said Will Lambek of Migrant Justice.

"Vermonters need to push our legislature and law enforcement in the other way, breaking the glass ceiling on the Fair and Impartial Policing Policy and releasing nonviolent incarcerated people, especially people of color, imprisoned by this State."

Henry Harris, Chair, VT National Lawyers Guild

"The Peace & Justice Center signed the petition to the VSP because we oppose the oppression Israeli governments involvement and torment of the Palestinian people and do not want our local law enforcement to adopt Israeli tactics. We believe in nonviolent action and community organizing. The fact that you responded to the community outcry of resistance shows that grassroots organizing and communal action are meaningful and valuable. Thank you for listening to the people you serve -- Vermonters. I applaud the VSP for cancelling the trip and implore you to pledge to prohibit any future participation in law enforcement exchange programs with the Israeli military." Rachel Siegel, Executive Director

"Our state police need to root out institutional racism in their operations, to cease perceiving people of color as threats, to uphold the dignity of all persons, and to learn how to de-escalate conflict. These are skills and attitudes they can learn here in the states. Let the decision to not learn from Israeli militarization be a catalyst for incorporating a new paradigm of non-violence and mitigation of institutional racism in Vermont according to our own laws."

Sylvia Knight, member of Jubilee Justice Committee, Cathedral Church of St.Paul, Burlington VT

"The tactics taught are inhumane and are used in the continued killing and oppression of communities of color across the nation and the globe. Law enforcement and elected officials should understand that we as a community are watching and will hold them accountable for their actions (and inactions)."

Mark Hughes, Justice for All

For more information about the national campaign to end US-Israeli law enforcement partnerships, see

<https://deadlyexchange.org>

*Vermonters for Justice in Palestine works to support the Palestinian people in their struggle for human rights and to end the illegal, immoral, and brutal Israeli occupation through education, advocacy, and action. We are committed to the principles of self-determination for the Palestinian people, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and full civil and political rights for all Palestinians in order to promote the equality and safety of both Palestinians and Israelis.* <https://vtjp.org/>